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Advancing the Practice: A Report of the US National Curator's Committee Ethics Subcommittee on the 2014 Curatorial Survey and Core Competencies Projects

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Introduction

The museum curatorial profession in the United States is in peril. At best it has stagnated in the face of radical economic, social and technological changes. At worst it is increasingly considered irrelevant (Adair, Filene, & Koloski, 2011) vis-à-vis post-structuralist attitudes towards the devaluation of expertise (Bauman, 1987), democratization of the institution (Cameron, 2010; Simon, 2010) an over-emphasis on education programs to take advantage of funding opportunities instead of the educational nature of the entire institution, and the US penchant for reliance on populism and statistics. These combined forces have caused the very nature of and need for the curatorial role to be questioned by many working in museums in the United States who would rather see curatorial functions shared by museum personnel, who wish the public to have an equal voice in exhibition and collection development, and who thereby deny the need for formal training. The cult of the amateur (Keen, 2007) reigns, conflating information with knowledge, opinion with fact, algorithm with theory, aggregation with curating, and democracy with accessibility, while museums are forced to rely on commercialization and attendance as arbiters of value.

Underscoring and compounding these problems is the fact that even the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the national representative body of museums, has failed to define or recognize the curatorial role as a contributing factor to museum success. Instead, curatorial issues are parceled out to other museum functions as is evidenced within the context of the AAM's standards and best practices for accreditation[37] and the presentation categories allowed at the AAM annual meeting[38]. This has effectively diluted the curatorial voice in

[37] List of accreditation categories: mission, governance/board, by-laws, planning, code of ethics, budget, human resources, development, exhibit design/fabrication, exhibit research/ curation, conservation, security, facilities management, public relations, marketing, legal counsel, membership, collections management.

[38] AAM annual Meeting subject categories: Career Management, Collections Stewardship, Development and Membership, Education and Interpretation, Exhibit Planning and Design, Facilities and Risk Management, Field-Wide Issues, Finance and Administration, Governance and Leadership, Marketing and Public Relations, Media

the advancement of the US museum profession and continues to ineffectively address the plethora of serious theoretical and ethical issues at the heart of not only the curatorial profession, but the museum institution as well. The result has been an alarming decrease in curator engagement in a nation-wide dialogue, as participation in the recent survey conducted by AAM's Curators Committee (CurCom) indicates.

The state of the profession in the US seems to be the result of a deepening divide created by museum studies graduate programs versus the growing need for curators trained beyond an academic domain. Not a direct corollary of museology, museum studies in American academic institutions tends to divert students' attention to practical applications of museum work, training generalists across the functional domains of the museum who do not necessarily understand the intellectual or historical foundations their intuitions are built upon. Meanwhile, curators are primarily trained as research academics in their respective domains of expertise, learning a solitary method of attaining their knowledge and a unidirectional form of sharing it – methods distinctly outmoded in the US museum community. Stereotyped as ivory-tower scholars, curators gain understanding of museum theory and principals while the increasingly complex nature of curatorial work is learned haphazardly through direct job experience.

This type of education leads to the reluctance of US curators to make concessions to the changing nature of a society that lives in the digital information age. Despite being preservers of culture and caretakers of "storehouses of knowledge,"(Cannon-Brookes, 1992, p. 116) curators have failed to stay current in the ways that culture and knowledge have been transformed (Antonini, 2012; Collinson, 2001; Lyotard, 1984; Zorich, 2012). The rise of digital culture has profoundly altered concepts like identity, community, individual, property, location, territory, and jurisdiction (Doueihi, 2011). These are the same concepts to which museum collections bear witness and that museum practitioners must reconsider through a prism of the affordances of information and communication technologies (ICTs) if museums are to remain relevant. Yet, while such technological, social, and economic paradigms continue their radical shift, the object-centric 19th century museum model barely changes. Transformation is feigned by superficially adopting ICTs (Kimmel & Deek, 1995; Marty, 2005; Ribeiro, 2007), awkwardly grafting applications, gadgets and databases onto the old model without a real understanding of their potential. Jeopardizing their relevance as keepers of cultural heritage, curators continue to fetishize their collections (Ribeiro, 2007), restricting access to the objects therein (M. L. Anderson, 1999; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Kimmel & Deek, 1995), even as society becomes preoccupied by information access (Lyotard, 1984; Rifkin, 2000). The implication for US museums is an industry that touts itself as educational, yet belies the fact by denigrating the roles of their own subject-matter experts – curators – who in turn fail to acknowledge the importance of up-to-date information access in the creation of knowledge.

CurCom has been aware of the rising concerns for US curators, recognizing, albeit slowly, that a course of action must be taken.

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and Technology, Organizational Planning and Evaluation. After much discussion with the CurCom Board, AAM admitted the word "curation" to a category during the 2015 Annual Meeting, the program for which presents, "Education, curation, and evaluation" as a category or presentations.

CurCom's Standing Committee on Ethics assumed the lead on two projects, with the premise that any solution presented to the issues at hand must have an ethical framework. To strengthen our understanding of the state of the profession, CurCom, with the assistance of AAM, created a survey of the education, experience and training needs of CurCom members to begin to track the convergence of museum studies with the curator function, as well as to frame the major issues confronting the profession. In response to these results and in an effort to advance curatorial practice and open dialogue among curators within the United States and globally, the Curator's Core Competencies initiative was launched. These two projects presented summarily in tandem here illustrate the expanding and significant challenges, roles, and duties faced by curators and the competencies that they must all possess to be successful. These projects are presented in this international forum as a communication of the status of two ongoing projects supported by CurCom. This article reflects ongoing work and does not pretend to be a full empirical treatment of survey data. While the survey was completed in January 2014 its data is still being analyzed in relation to other surveys carried out through AAM. Additionally, while the board of directors of CurCom voted unanimously to accept the document on April 28, 2015 just prior to the publication of this paper; it remains to be formally sanctioned by the Alliance.

It is further important to note the operating biases, which is chiefly a US perspective. First, as the survey data will show, this paper reflects the state of the curatorial field in the US. The authors recognize that there are fundamental differences between museums in the US and those throughout the rest of the global community. The survey results and proposed competencies are directed by and in response to issues particularly found among US curators and museums. There is no pretense that they are universally indicative or applicable; nevertheless the insight they provide will hopefully lead to broader dialogue and further investigation.

As a corollary, it must be acknowledged that the United States field of Museum Studies is different than that of Museology, or its geographical variants. Museum Studies taught in US universities is largely a practical application of general museum functions and the various roles in the museum. It is most commonly taught at the Master's degree level[39], but can also be found as a graduate certificate, requiring only one year of study or taken in tandem with another degree field.

Secondly, as board members of CurCom and experienced museum curators and administrators, the authors value the importance of the museum curator. Our bias is inherently to protect the field, but not ignoring its required evolution and historical shortcomings. Nevertheless, we find attempts to diminish the role of the curator to be short-sighted and unrealistic. Furthermore, CurCom is only one forum for a national conversation. We welcome other contributors from the US or other nations. If museum curators are to evolve, US or otherwise, then they must directly lead those changes.

Finally, the authors are not statisticians and no pretense is made to the contrary. All calculations presented are basic and the raw data is available for public review.

[39] Following the achievement of a Bachelor's degree, or four years of university study in a US university.

CurCom Survey

First, it should be reiterated that the presentation of the survey in this context is by no means an attempt to give full empirical treatment to the lengthy and data-rich results of the CurCom survey. Presenting it in juxtaposition with the creation of the Core Competencies requires the authors to adhere to a more summarized, purposeful and therefore subjective approach to the data. Therefore, those results that have informed the creation of the Curator's Core Competencies are presented to enrich the discussion which follows this section.

The survey was initiated by the Board of CurCom, and created by the members of its Ethics subcommittee, with input by staff members of the AAM. The initial questions were scripted to query members of CurCom about their professional needs, but these were later augmented and refined to better ascertain the demographics and education of the membership of CurCom. The final survey included twenty-five questions and was first submitted to 1376 members of CurCom on January 10, 2014. Though the survey was initially targeted at members and practicing curators, because the survey was circulated online[40] this target population could not remain strictly enforced. The survey closed on February 28, 2014 with 246 responses—189 from CurCom's membership—representing an estimated 13% response rate from CurCom members. The initial questions of the survey reveal a more nuanced understanding of these demographics.

The survey was broken into three parts. The first section assembled demographic data about the respondents and corresponded to information collected by other AAM surveys. The second section gathered information on the educational background and competencies of respondents to provide insight into the formative experience of curators. The third section reveals specific areas of interests and needs in the continuing education of curators, ultimately helping both CurCom and AAM design programs to respond. Specifically, the Curator Core Competencies were informed by the latter parts ofthis survey.

Demographics (Questions 1-8)
An overview of the data results of the first section reveals that of the vast majority of individuals who completed the survey, 89%, are currently members of the AAM; 68% are members of CurCom, and most, 52%, have been members for one to six years. The 31% who preferred not to answer the question on length of CurCom membership correspond precisely to the 31% who indicated that they are not members of CurCom. The vast majority, 45%, of respondents work in history museums or similar institutions.[41] Art Museums, at 15%, were the second most represented. According to the AAM staff, this is consistent with responses from across the special interest group surveys. Most respondents, 69%[42], define their primary role as

[40] Multiple emails to membership, listservs, LinkedIn Curcom group, Facebook Curcom group, etc.
[41] Question 4 asked respondents to indicate their institution type, marking all possible selections. The following choices were grouped with history museums when discussing the results above: Historic House, Historic Site/Landscape, Historical Society, or Military Museum/Battlefield. These as well as the response "History Museum" were marked 225 times, and while there were 276 respondents (people surveyed), there were 494 total responses.
[42] Not including nine respondents (+3%) who indicated major curatorial duties when responding to the "Other. Please specify" field.

curator. Nearly three-quarters, 73% have been in their current jobs for less than 10 years, yet in the field for more than 10 years (64%).
Most respondents, 38%, come from medium to large institutions (budgets ranging from US $250,000 to US $4M[43]. The pool of other respondents come equally, 17% each, from "big" museums (budgets larger than $4M) and those from "small" museums (budgets smaller than $250,000 annually). Again, these figures correspond to AAM's general membership demographics. Presented here, they help to contextualize the findings below.

Education (Questions 9- 14[44])
A small percentage, 16% of respondents, hold Ph.D.s; 13% of respondents had Ph.D.s related to their institution's collections[45]. Most respondents, 68%[46], have attained a Master's degree, yet 28% of these degrees are unrelated to the institutional collections. Respondents were asked to indicate if they had earned degrees in "Museum Studies" and at what level. Only four respondents claimed a Ph.D. in Museum Studies or Museology, and 119, or 43% of all respondents, indicated they had earned a Master's degree. From this survey, there is no way of knowing which Museum Studies degrees were indicated in the previous question as being "related" or "unrelated" to institutional collections, though, strictly speaking, a Museum Studies degree does not convey a collection specific expertise.

Of the respondents having Master's degrees in Museums Studies, 61% were required to write a thesis. Of the 165 respondents having formal Museums Studies backgrounds, 81% were required to have an internship before graduating, 95% had direct collection experience, 90% attained experience in exhibition planning, and 57% gained experience using collections software. By extrapolation, around half of the total survey respondents possibly had no internship (52%), collections experience (43%), exhibition planning experience (47%), or collections software training (67%)[47] as part of their formational studies. The commentary fields are interesting for this question; one respondent observed, "My degrees are not in Museum Studies. I'm too old," implying that she was older than Museum Studies as a degree field. As the landscape for US curators shifts, understanding the evolving dynamic between museology and curating will be important. The number of respondents to this survey make these findings on education statistically insignificant; however they do provide direction for future inquiries and a starting point for comparison to future data.

Experience and Competencies (Questions 16-25)
Question 16 asked about experience in common curatorial areas, revealing that most respondents have significant and frequent experience in collections research and planning, exhibitions development, project management and interpretation of objects. Closer inspection of the relative high frequency ("frequently" or "daily"), versus general rarity ("rarely" or "never"), can be

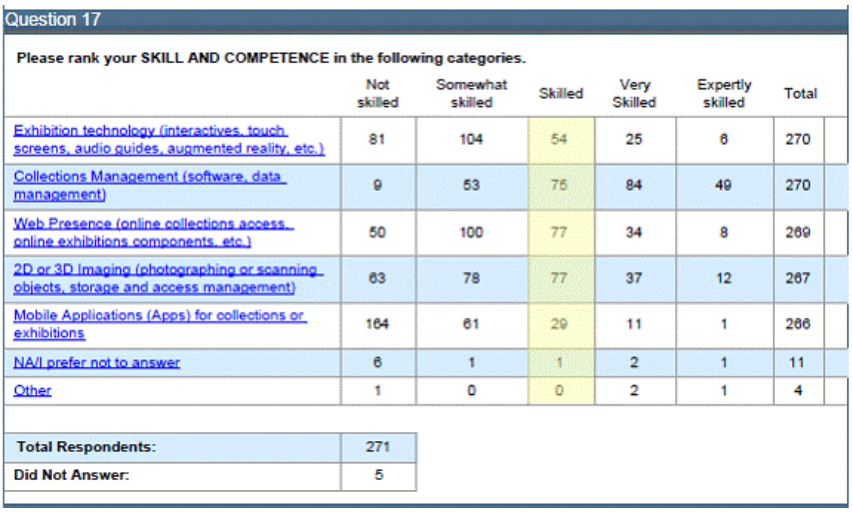
[43] All budget figures used given in US Dollars.
[44] Because of its narrative format, Question 15 will be addressed below.
[45] It is worth noting though that in the US curatorial profession a Ph.D. is not required and the overall percentage of persons in the US with a Ph.D. is 1% or less. http://www.petersons.com/graduate-schools/phd-programs-rigorous-educational.aspx
[46] Plus another seven or 2.5% of respondents replying to the "Other" field, who primarily indicated masters level study in their response (MFA, ABD, MA, etc).
[47] The survey does not query these facts specifically, though while some other museum-related fields may offer experience in these aspects, they do not broadly seek to train or educate in them.

accomplished by avoiding consideration of the middle field that indicates occasional experience. The comparison of the more extreme expressions reveals a better understanding of how curators are involved with areas often generalized as: "Collections", "Exhibitions" and "Interpretation" and should be noted by AAM and CurCom.

From this comparison can be noted a high frequency of "collections research," which countermands the common complaint that curators have no time for research. It is unclear in the survey whether this was general collection research to augment documented knowledge of objects, or research generated by exhibitions. Additionally, "accession planning," "exhibition planning" (object selection and design) and "label writing" were also indicated as high frequency experiences, whereas most respondents indicated that they were less frequently involved with "catalogue writing," and rarely with "catalogue production" and "copyright" issues like "rights and reproduction," whether online or in print. Respondents, generally curators, are frequently involved with "object interpretation", but less so with "docent training," "education" and "public programs,' all of which are generally categorized as "Interpretation".

On the whole, this seems to indicate the need for a deeper understanding of Curatorial Competencies and how the ongoing training and education in these competencies is being met by CurCom and AAM. Program fields divided into broad categories like "Collections," "Exhibitions," and "Interpretation," have started to take on altered meanings when they are dominated by non-curatorial influences. "Collections" has come to typically describe documentation and copyright issues more related to registrarial and legal practices rather than research, accession, or ethical issues. "Exhibitions" is dominated by high-end design and gadgetry and responds little to issues of object selection and label content. "Interpretation" is largely the purview of educators, except with regard to *object* interpretation, which ostensibly does not intersect significantly with "Education", "public programs" or "docent training". Yet there is a need by the curators to gain deeper insight into aspects of their job for which no one else has responsibility or training. Both questions 16 and 18 highlight this issue and their sub-questions were grouped into similar categories to underscore that relation.

Question 17 at first glance seems to reveal a general competency among curators in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which might suggest that curators have little need of training in the use of ICTs. However, when this data is examined in a different way it reveals the weakness of this suggestion. When examining frequency and rarity of experience for Question 17, if those who claim to be "skilled"—the middle field of response—are eliminated from immediate discussion and we compare what remains on either side of this segment, the reality of the situation becomes more apparent (See Figure 1). From such a perspective far more respondents are less skilled ("not skilled" or "somewhat skilled") in exhibition technology, web presence, 2D and 3D imaging, and mobile applications. When considering their competencies with digital technology, curators are, generally speaking, only skilled with collections management software.



Question 17

Please rank your SKILL AND COMPETENCE in the following categories.

	Not skilled	Somewhat skilled	Skilled	Very Skilled	Expertly skilled	Total
Exhibition technology (interactives, touch screens, audio guides, augmented reality, etc.)	81	104	54	25	6	270
Collections Management (software, data management)	9	53	75	84	49	270
Web Presence (online collections access, online exhibitions components, etc.)	50	100	77	34	8	269
2D or 3D Imaging (photographing or scanning objects, storage and access management)	63	78	77	37	12	267
Mobile Applications (Apps) for collections or exhibitions	164	61	29	11	1	266
NA/I prefer not to answer	6	1	1	2	1	11
Other	1	0	0	2	1	4

Total Respondents:	271
Did Not Answer:	5

Figure 1

Question 18 and 19 asked about interest in programs and training for the same fields discussed in Questions 16 and 17. The highest-ranked topics of interest for future programs are (in descending order): what makes a good exhibition, the future of collections research, exhibition development (theme and object selection), use of technology for collections and interpretation, interpretation of objects, and collections research. These interests seem to support the suppositions above about broadening the understanding of categories that treat curatorial interests. It is interesting to note that moderate or high interest *always* far outweighed low or no interest for these topics in all but one category, "Copyright for 3D Printing", where interest was almost exactly equal to a lack of interest.

Questions 20 through 24 addressed the accessibility and diffusion of information from AAM and CurCom. They generally indicated that respondents prefer online and local information sharing and do not regularly attend the national AAM conference because of cost and time. Almost 25% of respondents indicated that they did not attend in-person programs because of a distinct lack of programming in their areas of interest and expertise.

Both Questions 15 and 25 required narrative responses. The format of their analysis is similar, thus they are both treated here, though Question 15 is out of order. Question 15 asked for a narrative description of a curator and the variety of responses adds much needed nuance to the data revealed here. However, the responses are too extensive to be effectively treated herein. For a glimpse of the broader content, word frequency helps gauge the important ideas. The top ten most frequently used words[48] to respond to question 15 are: collection (169), exhibition (95), person (79), cares (77),

[48] Common articles and prepositions were removed from this list in addition: "curator" (102), "one" (14), "including" (8), "well" (7), "may" (5), "and/or" (10), "many" (7), "also" (14), "his/her" (3), "often"(3), "-related" (12), "based" (4), and "etc." (8). Modifications to word variations were made to unify the appearance of words appearing in plural, singular, gerund and other forms, specifically replacing the following: "Collections" (86) and "collection's" (3) with "collection"; "managing", "oversee" and "manage" with "management" (53); "cares" with "care" (42); "someone" with "person" (34); "museum's" and "museums" with "museum" (52); "interprets" (16) and "interpret" (9) with "interpretation"; "responsibility" with "responsible" (4); "create" with "creates"(5); "exhibit" with exhibition (8); "exhibits" with "exhibition" (29); "exhibitions" with "exhibition" (59); "interpreter" with "interpretation" (31).

museums (61), interpretation (60), responsible (57), objects (46), management (44), and research (43). Question 25, an opportunity to make general narrative comments, had thirty-one responses, including expressions of gratitude for doing the survey and explanations of educational background or institution. The rest sought to define some lingering issues in the survey or in the service of CurCom and AAM. The latter should be scrutinized more carefully than herein, but, based on word frequency, they generally speak about the following: curators (7), AAM (11), museum (10), "more" (9), collections (9), years (6), CurCom (6), work (5), institutions (5), experience (5), and curatorial (5).

Developing Core Competencies

From this survey data begins to emerge a picture of the curator that CurCom serves. It further begins to elucidate the general nature of educational formation of curators in the United States and to illustrate the issues for which this formation has and has not prepared the current professionals. The role of the museum curator is broadening, presenting new challenges for professionals already working in the field and for those seeking to break into this career. New skills are required to overcome these challenges and to augment the skills needed to be a traditional curator. This compilation of curatorial core competencies created by CurCom's Standing Committee on Ethics addresses these emerging skills and reinforces those that curators have always needed. During the creation of this document, several sources provided valuable information regarding the skills identified by respective institutions as integral to the role of curators. The AAM, CurCom's Code of Ethics, US Federal Government's position classifications, US National Park Service classifications, College Art Association's standards and guidelines, International Committee for the Training of Personnel, and International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics for Museums served as references, helping to create the foundation for this document. Most important were the informal conversations with curatorial colleagues and conference sessions since the 2012 AAM annual meeting, which provided valuable insights into the demands on museum curators today, and revealed the growing need to formally study curatorial education, experience, and training, as well as to express the competencies required to practice the craft. The recent survey conducted by CurCom validated some of the input taken from these discussions and revealed other interesting considerations.

Defining a Curator

According to the most recent version of CurCom's Curatorial Code of Ethics (CurCom, 2009), Curators are "highly knowledgeable, experienced, or educated in a discipline relevant to the museum's purpose or mission. Curatorial roles and responsibilities vary widely within the museum community and within the museum itself, and may also be fulfilled by staff members with other titles."

Unfortunately, this definition leaves much open to interpretation and says nothing of the varied and unique roles curators perform or the domains in which curators work. In essence, this statement says little about what curators *are* and even less about what curators *do,* effectively rendering the definition meaningless. Indeed, many of the same proponents for the democratization of the museum and devaluation of the curator also lay claim that anyone can be a curator, thereby diluting the title to the point of utter confusion as to what a

curator is. The Core Competencies are CurCom's suggested response to this driving question.

Rather than defining a curator by their function or role, which shackles curators to the same ineffective categories AAM placed them, the Core Competencies define curators by what they must know and within the domains they work. Viewed in this context, curators are not part of a program assembly line. Rather, they contribute meaningfully to philosophical issues that guide their institutions. Like all competence, curatorial competence must be rooted in a meaningful sum of knowledge, experience *and* skill. To reduce it to only skill or function undermines the larger contribution for which curators are uniquely capable. This also reinforces the growing concern that is evolving regarding how curators are educated in order to advance the practice.

The Core Competencies goes beyond trying to resolve this tension between the academic and procedural functions, relying on the nuance of what a competence is – knowledge, experience and skill combined, to frame the understanding of curators. In addition to a statement about what CurCom defines a curator as, this document details the domains in which curators work, the types of competencies curators must have, and the applied skills and faculties required to carry out those responsibilities.

Museum Curators are subject-matter experts in a field related to their museum's mission, researchers, supervisors of museum collections, exhibition developers, and public advocates for the collection. Curators provide museums with credibility as a trusted source of information, and act with uncompromising integrity. This requires an investment of time, for both the museum and the curator, and demands an unwavering dedication to a Code of Ethics. Curators traditionally study an academic discipline outside of museum studies, yet it is increasingly crucial that they be fully immersed in museology and know the role and function of museums to be successful members of a museum team and leaders for the advancement of the profession.

Thus, curators must be much more than academics who work with collections; they must be information brokers who, through learned and creative interpretation, create meaningful experiences for people. Curators must foster civic engagement through social and cultural dialogue, acting as advocates for the collection and the public alike. Curators should be comfortable in galleries, archives, libraries, community forums and even digital landscapes. They are engaged in their profession and constantly consider new approaches to their work.

It is accepted that a museum's mission, size or complexity of a collection, the degree to which the institution is interested in publishing, or the level of responsibility on an exhibition team dictates the priorities of curators. Some institutions have assistant curators that work under the tutelage of a seasoned professional. In others, the curatorial profession involves independent responsibility, often with substantial freedom within their primary area of interest. They identify, define and select specific problems for study and determine the most fruitful investigations and approaches to the problem area. Whether working as curator or assistant curator, the role they play in the institution is vital.

The Core Competencies

In order to avoid the functional categories of "Exhibitions", "Collections" and "Interpretation" into which functional facets of the curatorial domain have been fractured, the CurCom Ethics subcommittee sought to find a logical, comprehensible way to organize the competencies without reducing the curator to factors of performance. By examining existing documents of our sister institutions, the Preservation, Research, Communication model, first put forth by the Reinwart Academie in Amsterdam, proved to be a model that not only allows, but encourages, knowledge, experience, and practical skill to converge as competencies under these important categories that underpin the entire museal institution.

Preservation, Research and Communication remain vital efforts; regardless of their respective institution's focus area, curators work in three domains within museums. Within these three foundational elements, CurCom's Standing Committee on Ethics recommends that curators of all academic disciplines possess the following nine core competencies and related applied skills:

Within Preservation:

(1) collection planning, (2) collecting, (3) collection care

Within Research:

(4) scholarly research, (5) object research, (6) applied research

Within Communication:

(7) exhibition development (8) education, (9) outreach and advocacy

Additionally, CurCom recommends the consideration of "super competencies" that enhance curators' abilities to perform within each of these domains. These do not fit in any one area; rather they span the spectrum of competencies. These are currently identified as:

Digital literacy: Understanding the value of utilizing technology in all aspects of the curatorial method is a vital competency for curators now and in the future. This is not to suggest that curators become programmers, but curators do need to understand how they can use technology to perform within each curatorial function. Today, curators deal with digital-born objects, the digitization of objects and collections, and use technologies to aid in the collection and research functions. Basic knowledge of collections management software, email, and social networking is insufficient.

Management / leadership: While relying on many of the same skills needed to perform competently in the communication domain, management and leadership converges all three curatorial areas. Explained within specific core competencies, the ability to manage people, time, and resources, and to inspire others by providing purpose, motivation, and direction are paramount.

Sustainability: Sustainability requires curators to be good stewards of their environment, their communities, and their resources. Beyond fiscal ramifications, the choices museums make have effects beyond the institutional structure. Sustainability informs how, where, and when curators preserve, research, communicate, and establishes credibility with an informed public. Increasingly, sustainability must take into consideration limitations on growth and practicality of continuation.

Preservation

Preservation of a collection goes beyond the physical well-being of the objects under a curator's care. Preservation encompasses the assurance of a well-balanced collection and development of a strategic collecting plan that acknowledges an institution's ethical obligation to preserve the material culture of a society for posterity as well as the knowledge, information, and data regarding those objects. If the power of an object is its story or meaning, the research and communication domains are equally as important to preservation. The following three core competencies are specific to this domain:

Collection Planning
Curators have the responsibility to plan for and establish a collection that is meaningful as a source of information for scholars and laymen, whether it is via public exhibition or academic study, and which supports the mission of the museum. This requires the ability to objectively survey a museum collection and use expertise to identify its gaps, duplications or excess. The expansion or reduction of the size, significance and complexity of a collection is a corollary of scholarly research (*v. infra*).

Planning also requires the ability to develop and implement a statement on scope of collections, which is essential for long-term viability of the collection, inhibits the duplication of objects, and helps keep the collection focused. Strategic or long-term planning is an institutional prerogative and the collection plan must adhere to institutional policy, mission statement, and current established best practices.

Collecting
The ability to plan a balanced collection is the prerequisite competency for expanding the collection. Collecting proactively requires seeking objects that fill the gaps in the collection and building networks of potential donors and vendors to aid this process. It requires curators to develop public relations skills, signaling a notable departure from traditional academic preparation, and includes making connections with persons or organizations that can contribute items to the collections or arrange for gifts, donations, or bequests. Fieldwork or the actual physical collection of artifacts or specimens, traditional methods for many curators (particularly in anthropological or natural history museums), remain a valuable methodology. Locating and authenticating objects, negotiating the purchase of objects, and corresponding with other curators are all paramount applied skills for curators. Additionally, familiarity with the Curators Code of Ethics and museum accession and deaccession procedures reinforces the curator's commitment to integrity and high standards.

Collections Care
Although it is the collections managers and registrars who typically oversee the day-to-day maintenance of collections, curators are ultimately responsible for its care and preservation. Nevertheless, curators must know the fundamental requirements of object preservation and best practices of documentation and collections record management. Curators must have a working knowledge of handling, storing, and caring for objects in order to ensure compliance with current best practices. Furthermore, curators must have the ability to recognize objects in need of professional conservation and to coordinate those efforts. Lending and borrowing objects with other

institutions is a staple of museum work and requires curators to understand the inherent risk to objects from travel.

Research

Scholarly research is at the very core of what a curator is, yet it is only one of three types of research curators must master. Object and applied research are also core competencies within the domain of research.

Scholarly Research
Scholarly research is the study and investigation that contributes to the sum of knowledge. In museums, this type of research is traditionally performed by the curatorial staff and aligns with the museum mission (ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 7). It requires empirical and original research and writing, using accepted scholarly methodology aligning with the curator's academic discipline. It requires writing for peer-reviewed journals or other scholarly publications.

For museum professionals other than curators, the scholarly research core competency may be the most undervalued aspect of the curatorial role, yet it is one of the most important. The scholarly prestige and credibility of the museum is dependent upon the reputation of the curatorial staff as subject matter experts (M. Anderson, 2004). A strong command of the use and citation of primary and secondary sources coupled with a professional, scholarly writing style is necessary when publishing original research. Equally as important are the abilities to recognize subjective and objective viewpoints. Synthesizing information and data into an orderly narrative or thesis that is supported by empirical evidence gathered through the use of learned research methods is a necessary skill for curators. Curators must use their broad, substantive knowledge in their particular academic disciplines and specialized knowledge in their fields when called upon as the subject matter expert of the institution they serve.

Object Research
ICOM's Code of Ethics for Museums charges museums to "establish the full history of [objects] since discovery or production" (ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 3). Curators are the natural persons responsible for this activity. Categorizing, classifying, documenting, establishing or expanding taxonomic systems for collected specimens, artifacts, or works of art are curatorial core competencies that apply to object research. This type of research is essential for gaining intellectual understanding of a museum collection. Curators are not normally expected to know everything about each object in the collection; rather this competency involves connoisseurship and the ability to conduct research to determine the authenticity, importance, and quality of an object, artwork, specimen, or relic. Emphasis on connoisseurship and subject-matter expertise within the context of museum collections in in decline. Museum function and vocational skill have begun to overshadow this basic tenant of curatorial work. This ability must be re-prioritized in recognition of the demand for more information. Researching and documenting objects is at the root of providing information on the collection and fulfilling the museum's educational mandate.

Applied Research
Curators investigate, interpret, collect, and arrange information and objects necessary to support the educational and public service responsibilities of museums through exhibitions or targeted educational programs. Rather than directly adding to a body of knowledge, this competency involves synthesizing and interpreting facts and scholarly research (of their own or other scholars) for public inquiry and disseminating information and ideas to many minds, most often through exhibitions. Furthermore, the information gathered by curators through this form of research and distributed through exhibitions must be "well-founded, accurate, and gives appropriate consideration to represented groups or beliefs" (ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 8). Acting as an information broker, curators must be able to compile data from a multitude of sources, distinguish between good information and bad, and develop a narrative - be it through explanatory material or exhibit label text - relevant to the public the museum serves. Applied research requires the curator to write interpretively. Due to the collaborative nature of this competency, curators must be able to work with others inside and outside the museum to compile information.

Communication

Curators communicate with peers, museum administrators, colleagues, other scholars, and the public through exhibits, outreach and advocacy, and educational programs. This domain involves the ability to communicate effectively with a variety of people from different backgrounds. No longer relegated to offices, libraries and archives, curators navigate public venues, the digital landscape, and other institutions to gather and disseminate data that aids in the curatorial process.

Interpersonal skills are vital, particularly verbal communication and personal observation. Already a part of the planning core competency, written professional and scholarly communication is also an applied skill of curators within the communication core competency. Increasingly, curators must develop a digital literacy that exceeds the basic use of ICTs for professional communication. They must also begin adopting a more profound understanding of ICTs and keep up with their evolution. Curators do not need to write code, but they need to understand how to use ICTs for different types of communication, visual or textual, and not rely on non-curatorial personnel to make decisions about curatorial content, especially in online spaces.

Exhibitions
According to ICOM, museums "have an important duty to develop their educational role and attract wider audiences from the community, locality, or group they serve" (ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 8). Accordingly, as the most visible of the curatorial functions, exhibition development has become increasingly complex and collaborative. While some institutions have exhibition designers on staff or contract with design/fabrication companies, the judgments regarding what stories to tell, what artifacts to use to illustrate those narratives, the most effective method of delivering the message, or the use of space falls on curators, particularly in smaller institutions. More and more, curators are being asked to serve - sometimes lead or manage - on exhibition planning groups. As a member of an exhibition team where collaboration with museum staff from other

functional areas is used to decide on narratives, themes, or other elements, curators should use their influence as the subject matter expert on staff to steer the team towards a logical solution.

When serving as the team leader or project manager, budgeting, resource management, and the ability to set and meet deadlines are necessary applied skills. Not to be overlooked, creating descriptive outlines and narrative scripts are responsibilities of the curator.

Writing

Writing for museums is complex and demanding. Curators must master the ability to communicate in writing to many ages, constituencies and in various media. Exhibition planning often requires interoffice communication as well as the ability to write descriptive outlines, narrative scripts, and scholarly works for publication. Equally, if not more important, is a curator's competency with interpretive writing. Often the most overlooked applied skill, the capability to synthesize complicated information and present that information to an audience with varying degrees of ability, is a necessity. Curators must know how to condense narratives into shortened text panels through interpretive writing techniques, ensuring that exhibition labels are accessible to many ages and not esoteric compilations of incomprehensible information. Accessibility is very much an ethical concern. While curators have the responsibility to "indicate clearly the significance of collections as primary evidence" to their constituents and make "collections and all relevant information available as freely as possible," that information must be cognitively accessible (ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 6). If our treasures are accessible to the publics we serve, then so must be the information regarding those objects.

This core competency is unique to curators and separates them from professionals who work in related fields— history curators cannot just be historians nor art curators only art historians. Objects make a collection, and a collection makes a museum. Though arguments have been made that museums do not need collections, there has yet to be an exhibition without them. Using objects to illustrate an idea or series of ideas is at the very heart of what defines a curator. This is known to the field as object interpretation. While visitors certainly create their own meaning out of the objects that curators arrange in an exhibition, there is always an attempt by the curator to reflect upon a larger ideal. Curators help others make sense out of objects and exhibitions, effectively opening windows of possibility and actualization. This competency requires a high level of creativity and expertise. The use of collections in exhibitions and the way curators think about the objects in their care - what they mean and what they can help illustrate - is central to the curator's role.

Using collections artistically and creatively may be the most difficult applied skill to teach. Indeed, there are few places to learn this skill other than on-the-job experience. Curators should strive to master those skills as well as challenging themselves to be original, thoughtful and unique.

Outreach and Advocacy

This core competency is perhaps the broadest expansion outside the traditional curator's domain. Although not formally trained to interact with the public through academic programs, curators increasingly must interact with diverse publics encompassing a range of ages and backgrounds. Traditionally this has been limited to donors and

collectors, leaving educators to engage the broader public. Today curators are required to create more dialogue with constituents. Furthermore, because museums reflect the value systems and beliefs of a community, it is imperative for curators to understand the cultures of their publics. Keeping in mind that curators are reciprocal advocates for the public and the collection, the core competency of outreach and advocacy involves the ability to be actively involved in community events and engaged with community members. Interpersonal skills are absolutely vital in performing museum outreach. Curators' constituents are a wealth of information that must be tapped to better perform the exhibition and collections functions.

Increasingly, museum outreach and advocacy is taking place in an online environment. Curators (and Museum Studies graduates) are largely absent from the digital literacy required to make them capable participants. Instead, descriptive texts are rehashed from one medium to the next with little thought or understanding going into the generation of the communication appropriate to the medium.

Education

The educational function curators perform is often very different from that of museum educators, tour guides or docents. Lecturing, gallery talks, publication of additional informational pamphlets or catalogues, formal classes, and student mentorship typically defines the nature of this core competency and requires an applied skill of public speaking. The education function curators fulfill for museums usually focuses on adult audiences and typically those with higher levels of education.

Although curators rely upon museum educators for their pedagogical expertise curators do play a part in this aspect of museum work. The two professions often collaborate extensively while developing education programs and exhibits; the method for this collaboration is particular to each museum. While curators provide information and expertise on the collections, subject matter, and exhibitions, educators provide curators with projection platforms to fulfill specific public interest and needs. This requires curators to have the ability to collaborate professionally.

Conclusion

Curating is an art form. It is a creative process that is the sum of rigorous scholarly preparation, continuously deepened expertise, and carefully applied skill. For this reason, and like art itself, curating and the curator have proven historically difficult to define. It is also for this reason that those who do not grasp the fullness of the job beyond its function, have also failed to understand its critical importance to the legacy of museums and indeed our cultural heritage. Within this paper, we have merely been able to glance at that nature through statistical mining and extrapolation in the CurCom survey. And we have paid homage its past and future through the Core Competencies initiative. Preservation, Research and Communication are the core of museum field and indeed the curatorial profession, highlighting the complexity of curatorship, not just practical function, but also applied theory, philosophy, and experience.

Yet, we recognize that the profession, technology, and the expectations of museum-goers evolve, and the curatorial role will subsequently broaden or contract. The goal is to advance the practice, evolving the scholarly formation and continued education of

the field. As a profession, curators must proactively confront of issues that have radically shifted societal values and the museum profession. Curators should start identifying where museum studies and curation can cross-pollinate for the benefit of the field. Though museologists are not curators, many of the crucial questions that arise within the field are strongly related to curatorial activity. If museology is to be more than just irrelevant theory and more adequately address the theoretical and practical elements that have destabilized the traditional models (Gob & Drouguet, 2010), we must evolve how it contributes to its adherents and practitioners. When crucial museum issues rest at the heart of curatorial activity, and there is little intersection of curators with museology, what is the hope for evolving the museum field?

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Abstract

Alternately reviled and revered, curators retain an iconic role at the heart of museum activities. But what have they to do with museology? Curators are the intellectual, authoritative center of a traditional model whose very foundations have been destabilized by economic, technological and social change. The role of the curator is challenged by the reductive, linear thinking that has accompanied the rise in computer technology (Doueihi, 2011; Marty, 2008), the dependence on attendance and popularity that now determines user-centric operations (Janes, 2009; Mairesse, 2005; Tobelem, 2010), and a general post-structuralist, anti-intellectual attitude (Bauman, 1987; Cameron, 2010; Mason, 2006). Are curators then the last bastion of old-guard Enlightenment intellectuals, or a stop-gap for the dissolution of culture in the face of radical egalitarianism in the Digital Age? To elucidate realities of the evolving role of curators and their relationship with museology, this paper will summarize and juxtapose two major projects of CurCom, the US National Curator's Committee. In tandem, these projects – a survey of the education, experience and training needs of CurCom members, and the elaboration of Curators' Core Competencies – illustrate the expanding and significant challenges, functions, and duties faced by US curators and the applied skills that they must all possess to be successful. Though museologists are not curators, many of the crucial questions that arise within the field are strongly related to curatorial activity. If museology is to be more than just irrelevant theory and more adequately address the theoretical and practical elements that have destabilized the traditional models (Gob & Drouguet, 2010), we must evolve how it contributes to its adherents and practitioners. When crucial museum issues rest at the heart of curatorial activity, and there is little intersection of curators with museology, what is the hope for evolving the museum? The summary of these national projects in this international forum is intended to invite comparison and provoke conversation.

Résumé

Tantôt récusés, tantôt vénérés, les conservateurs jouent encore et toujours un rôle emblématique au cœur des activités muséales. Mais quel est leur rapport avec la muséologie ? Les conservateurs représentent le centre intellectuel, autoritaire, d'un modèle traditionnel dont les fondements mêmes ont subi les

bouleversements économiques, technologiques et sociaux. Le rôle du conservateur se trouve menacé face au mode de pensée restrictif, linéaire, qui s'est développé parallèlement à l'essor de la technologie informatique (Doueihi, 2011; Marty, 2008; Peacock, 2007), avec les opérations désormais centrées sur l'utilisateur et axées essentiellement sur la fréquentation et la popularité (Janes, 2009; Mairesse, 2005; Tobelem, 2010) et une attitude globalement post-structuraliste et anti-intellectuelle (Bauman, 1987; Cameron, 2010; Mason, 2006). Cela signifie-t-il que les conservateurs seraient les derniers remparts d'intellectuels des Lumières de la vieille garde ou une solution provisoire pour freiner la dissolution de la culture face à l'égalitarisme radical de l'ère du numérique ? Afin de mieux cerner quel est, réellement, le rôle des conservateurs, et essayer de définir la relation importante en pleine transformation qu'ils entretiennent avec la muséologie, ce rapport présentera deux projets majeurs menés par CurCom, le Comité national américain des conservateurs. L'un consiste en une enquête approfondie sur les besoins des membres de CurCom en expérience et formation, et l'autre en la définition des compétences essentielles que doivent posséder les conservateurs. Ces projets illustrent les rôles et les tâches de plus en plus vastes qui incombent aux conservateurs ainsi que les défis croissants auxquels ils sont confrontés, et les compétences pratiques qu'ils doivent posséder pour réussir dans leur carrière. Bien que les muséologues ne soient pas des conservateurs, un grand nombre des questions cruciales qui se posent dans ce domaine sont étroitement liées à l'activité du conservateur. Si la muséologie doit être plus que de la théorie non pertinente, et réagir de manière plus adéquate face aux éléments qui ont bouleversé les modèles traditionnels (Gob & Drouguet, 2010), il nous faut chercher à comprendre ce qu'elle apporte à ses professionnels et ses praticiens. Si les questions muséales cruciales siègent au cœur de l'activité curatoriale, et qu'il existe peu de points de convergence entre les conservateurs et la muséologie, quel espoir peut-on alors avoir que le domaine des musées évolue?